



KEYWORDS: *Rock engravings – Bronze Age – New genre – Puisots style – Yonne – France*

A NEW SET OF ROCK ENGRAVINGS CLOSE TO THE FORÊT DE FONTAINEBLEAU'S MALMONTAGNE STYLE FOUND IN FRANCE'S YONNE DEPARTMENT

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Abstract. Since June 2019, systematic surveys carried out in the township of Villemannoche, a village located on the northern edge of France's Yonne department, have led to the discovery of fine engravings similar to the Malmontagne rock art style associated with the Forêt de Fontainebleau. More than 140 engraved shelters exhibiting the traits of what we have called the Puisots style have been found so far in the woods of Villemannoche and adjacent plots in Champigny and Pont-sur-Yonne. The elements of the two ensembles, which seem to be linked to the late Bronze Age, share obvious typological links. In addition to a few shared symbols, the engravings in both groups are usually made in cramped cavities, are about the same size and in the same positions relative to their spaces, exhibit fine neat workmanship, and include representations of anthropomorphous figures, 'fantastic beings', geometric signs and zoomorphs. Some of the more complex compositions appear to be symbolic representations of mythological scenes or stories. These similarities indicate that the Malmontagne and Puisots engravers must have shared some cultural and spiritual traits, which they interpreted according to their region's particular conventions and beliefs.

1. A brief history of the discoveries

The Haut Pays forest, overlooking the village of Villemannoche, in the far north of the Yonne department of France, is known both for its profusion of sandstone outcroppings and boulders and its many polissoirs (for polishing stone axes), which were described by Pierre Glaizal (2005: 32). Despite the presence of these pre-Historic vestiges, nobody has ever reported engraved cavities in the area, and it was not searched methodically until June 2019. When this was done, the ongoing survey led to the discovery of more than 140 engraved cavities and shelters, scattered over a little less than seven square kilometres of the town's woods and several bordering plots in the neighbouring towns of Champigny and Pont-sur-Yonne. These contain fine engravings (Fig. 1) that closely resemble those belonging to the Malmontagne style (Lebon et al. 2017a) associated with the forêt de Fontainebleau (Caldwell 2015; Lebon 2015; Lebon et al. 2017b, Valois 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, Bouillot 2020).

We have chosen to name this new ensemble and its style after the tract within the Haut Pays forest where most engraved cavities were found, Puisots, leading us to refer to the ensemble as the Puisots style.

2. Main characteristics of Puisots-style engravings

The distribution of the boulders and outcroppings

containing the engravings roughly approximates the natural distribution of sandstone in the forest, with an apparent concentration in two adjacent sub-localities: Les Puisots and Les Fourneaux, which contain more than 77% of the overall corpus.

Most of the engraved cavities are small (Fig. 2). The position of these little grottoes, overhangs and niches does not follow any rule in relation to the rocks that contain them, since they occur at all levels and sometimes even below the current ground level. The size or appearance of the rocks does not seem to have contributed to the choice of the cavities to be engraved either. However, some of the outcroppings and boulders have suggestive shapes that look (to the modern eye) like animal figures.

None of the engraved panels had been found before because they were all hidden by sediment until they were discovered. They are also generally small in size and usually occupy only a limited part



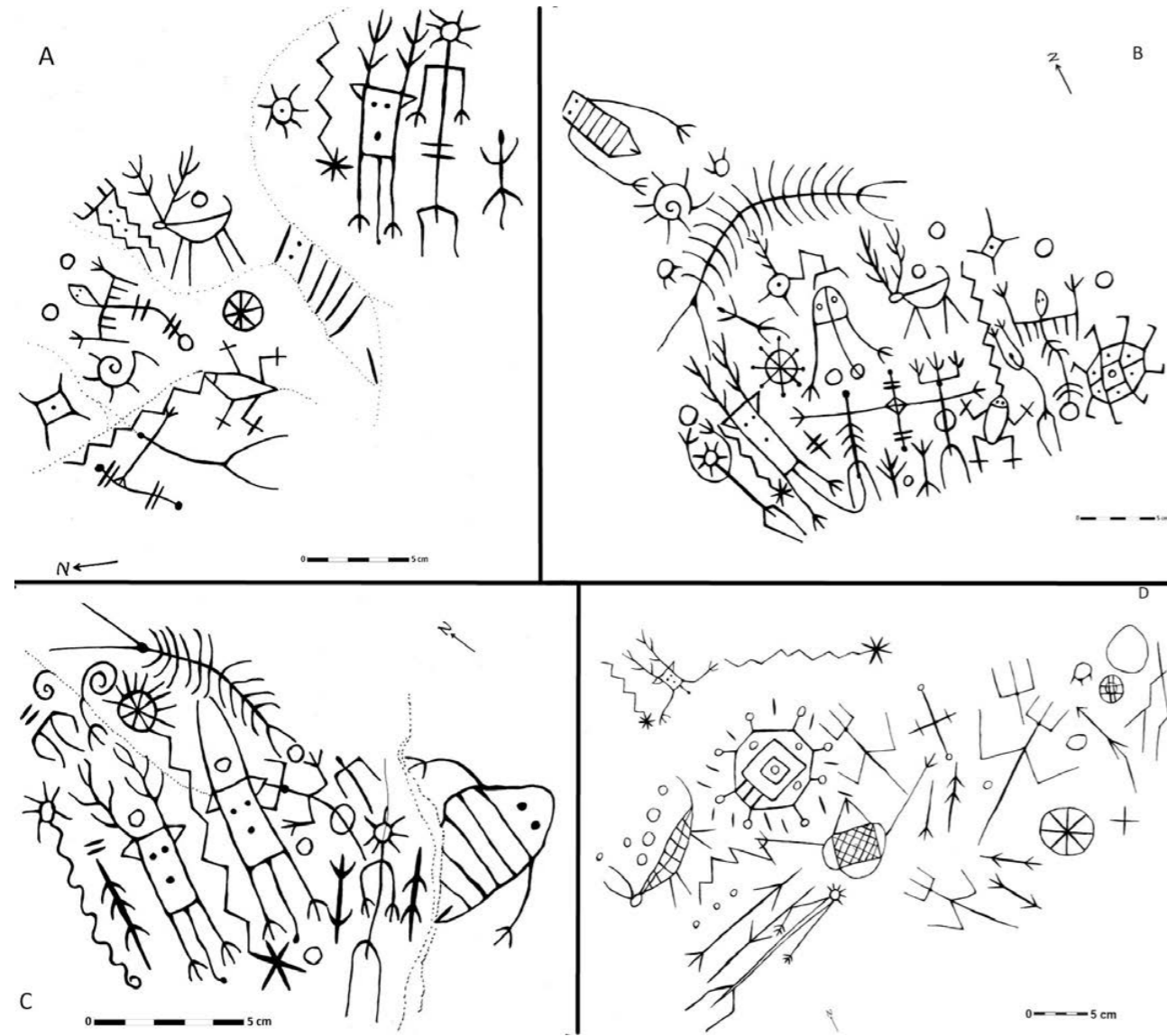


Figure 1. Panels from Puisot-style sites. A. Chailleuse 2; B. Chailleuse 4; C. les Puisots 2; D. les Puisots 23. Tracings by the author.



Figure 2. A: Les Puisots 7, B: Les Terres Nantos 2, C: Le Bas des Mardelles 1. The arrow indicates the position of the engraved panel (photos by the author).

cavities (the majority of the engraved zones would fit on an A4 sheet of paper, with only a few being bigger than A3 paper). Furthermore, only a few rare cavities have more than one engraved panel. Luckily, most of

the panels are well-preserved. When the engravings are eroded (apparently, in most cases, because they were scratched into exceedingly soft sandstone), their lines are still clearly readable.



Figure 3. Various panels in the Puisots style. A: les Puisots 2, B: les Puisots 31, C and E: les Puisots 23, D: les Puisots 22, F: les Puisots 20 (photos by Michel Rey).

In some ways, the Puisots style differs from the Malmontagne style. The engravings of both styles share the distinction of being fine, small and, to a large extent, figurative. Both engraving types are also exclusively drawn on cavity floors and are never dispersed in their hollows or chambers. Furthermore, the panels of both areas always appear to be different from any previously known rock art style and are meticulously executed (Fig. 3). Although the panels within each corpus sometimes resemble each other and often include the

same graphic units and symbols as other engravings in their group, their compositions are never identical. The repeated elements are mainly:

- a 'vocabulary' of graphic units (some of which, as we will see, are shared between the related groups) that get rearranged;
- schematic outlines of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures, along with presumed imaginary beings and creatures (often composed of the above graphic units);



Figure 4. Signs found in both the Malmontagne and Puisots styles. 1, 2 and 5: Haut Mont 46; 3: EMGP-264; 4: Malmontagne 34; 6: EMGP-66; 7: La Mare des Pressoirs 7; 8: Haut Mont 41; 9, 30 and 31: Haut Mont 42; 10: La Mare des Pressoirs 5; 11: le Rocher Fourceau 14; 12 and 29: EMGP-165; 13: EMGP-173; 14: EMGP-67; 15: EMGP-152; 16: Haut Mont 16; 17: EMGP-93; 18: EMGP-39; 19: Malmontagne 36; 20: EMGP-138; 21: EMGP-245; 22: EMGP-197; 23: Rocher Besnard 03; 24: Rocher Besnard 04; 25: Mont Merle 1; 26: le Rocher Fourceau 11; 27: EMGP-270; 28: EMGP-119; 32: Malmontagne 39; 33: EMGP-56; 34: Malmontagne 48; 35: les Puisots 23; 36 and 47: Le Moulin 2; 37: les Puisots 10; 38: EMGP 5 Villemanoche Les Puisots Loc 1; 39: les Fourneaux 2; 40 and 53: les Puisots 32; 41: les Puisots 12; 42 and 56: les Puisots 27; 43: EMGP 3 Villemanoche Les Puisots Loc 1; 44: les Puisots 28; 45: les Puisots 30; 46: Chailleuse 4; 48: les Puisots 34; 50 and 62: le Moulin 1; 51: Chailleuse 5; 52: les Puisots 18; 49, 55 et 59: les Puisots 31; 57, 67 and 68: Chailleuse 2; 58 and 64: les Puisots 29; 60: EMGP 2 Villemanoche Les Puisots Loc 1; 61: EMGP 7 Villemanoche Les Puisots Loc. 1; 65: les Puisots 22; 66: EMGP 3 Villemanoche Les Puisots Loc 1. Tracings by the author and Laurent Valois.

- and the same kind of geometric patterns (furrows, grids and rings) found in the Ile-de-France's so-called 'classic' rock art.

Another important feature that the groups share, despite the variation in the number and density of engravings in their panels, is that each composition seems to be completely homogeneous in terms of workmanship and style and never shows signs of having been made by more than one engraver. One sign of their coherent organisation is that elements hardly ever overlap. The only panel with later additions or super-impositions in the present style, for example, is Puisots 14.

Among the most remarkable motifs in the newly discovered style are figures holding complex objects reminiscent of sceptres (68 in Fig. 4), wearing headdresses (5 to 10 in Fig. 5), creatures with rectangular faces adorned with antlers (20 to 22 in Fig. 5), beings with striped and often sexualised bodies (59 and 60 in Fig. 4), representations of 'deer' (55 in Fig. 4), 'woodlice' (*Oniscidea*) and myriapods such as 'centipedes' and 'millipedes' (58 in Fig. 4), 'frogs' (2 in Fig. 5), wheel-shaped motifs (40 to 42 in Fig. 4), and grooves with lateral barbs (46 to 57 in Fig. 5).

It is essential to point out that none of the imagery in the known corpus is suggestive of a weapon or anything warlike.

3. Similarities and differences between the Puisots and Malmontagne styles

Although the two sets of engravings are about 32 km apart, it seems evident that there is a stylistic and typological relationship between these otherwise highly original sets. This similarity is also found in the geography of the various sites, the style of the engravings, the supports used, and the themes apparent in the engraved compositions.

From a topographical point of view, the Puisots and Malmontagne groups are located in natural settings, whose configurations resemble each other closely. The sites of both concentrations are near rivers (the Loing or the Seine in the Malmontagne style, and the Yonne in the Puisots ensemble) among the first sandstone outcrops, which contrast with the surrounding landscapes. In both cases, these are uninhabited and wild areas, containing rocks with astonishing shapes that would have attracted and fascinated engravers.

As we mentioned above, Puisots-style engravings are fine and neatly organised, in the sense of avoiding overlaps between graphic units and in relation to the surrounding space, and form homogeneous, grouped, compact compositions. They are usually

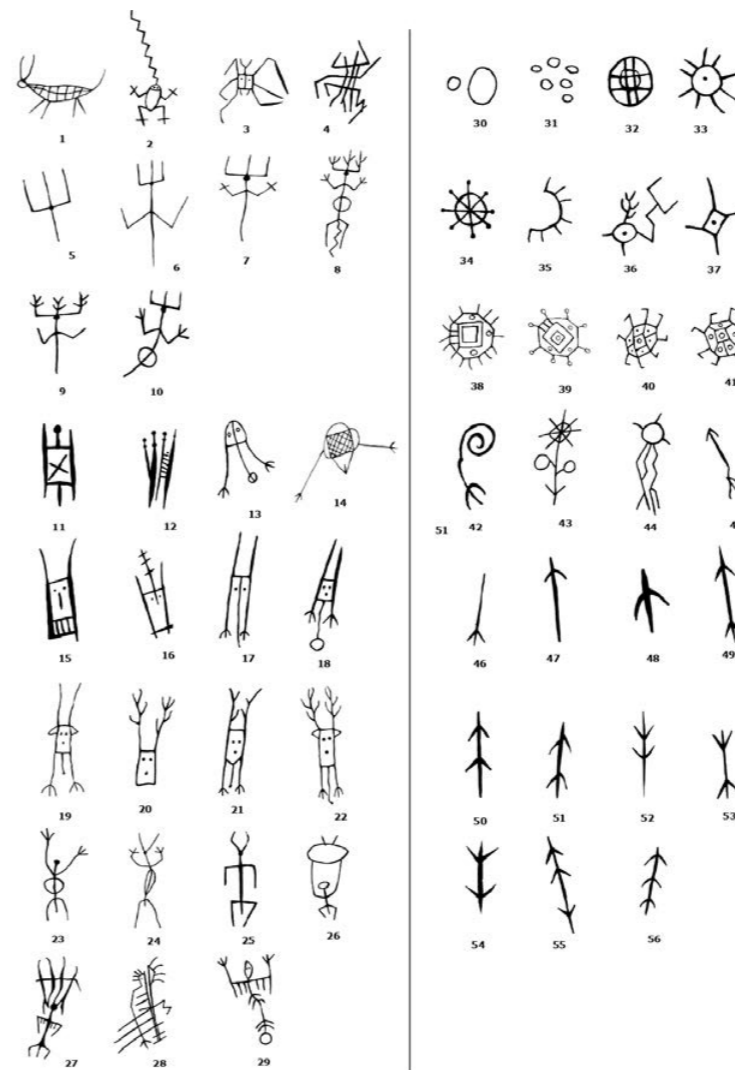


Figure 5. Engravings of the Puisots style absent from the Malmontagne ensemble. 1, 5, 6, 14, 31, 32, 39 and 46: les Puisots 23; 2, 13, 29, 34, 37 and 40: Chailleuse 4; 3: les Puisots 24; 4: les Puisots 8; 7 and 41: les Puisots 19; 8: les Puisots 32; 9 and 36: les Puisots 31; 10: les Puisots 29; 11 and 12: le Champ Guénin 1; 15, 16 and 27: le Moulin 2; 17, 21 and 55: Moque Bouteille 1; 18: les Puisots 17; 19 et 23: les Puisots 27; 20 and 33: les Puisots 30; 22 et 42: les Puisots 29; 24, 35: les Fourneaux 4; 25 and 54: les Puisots 35; 26, 30 and 56: les Puisots 20; 28: le Moulin 1; 38 and 48: les Fourneaux 2; 43: les Puisots 41; 44: les Puisots 32; 45: les Puisots 9; 47, 48: les Puisots 14; 49: les Fourneaux 8; 50: Bel Air 1; 51: les Puisots 16; 52: les Puisots 39; 53: les Puisots 43 (tracings by the author).

incised into the floor of a cavity and are never dispersed in it. The majority only occupy small areas with a few exceptions, such as Puisots 23 and Chailleuse 4, larger than an A3 format. The use of natural relief, including cracks, edges, prominences and natural cups, also occurs frequently in the compositions of both the Puisots and Malmontagne styles. These features sometimes limit a panel, highlight figures or help form their contours.

From these points of view, the engravings in the Puisots style do not differ in any way from those in the Malmontagne style. The same applies to the choice and the nature of the cavities. In both cases, the engravers favoured cavities that were often cramped,



Figure 6. Presumed engraving tools from Les Puisots locus 2 (photo by Valérie Testart).



Figure 7. Movable block EMGP 19, Villemanoche, Les Usages 3 (photo by Valérie Testart).

discreet, and sometimes even simple hollows in the rock.

It should be noted that several movable blocks bearing Puisots-style engravings were discovered around the bases of two fallen trees near the engraved sites of Puisots 23, 27, 28 and 29. These blocks were associated with a small limestone pebble, naturally perforated flints, and ceramic fragments (Fig. 6) like those discovered with portable engravings at Malmontagne-style sites (Lebon et al. 2017b: 70). Therefore, the engravers of both the Malmontagne and Puisots styles used the same two types of supports for their engravings — fixed rocks and movable blocks (Fig. 7).

Although many of the recurring elements in the Malmontagne repertoire are absent from the Puisots style, the engravings in both styles appear to be symbolic representations inspired by cosmogonic myths and spiritual or mythological beliefs. Many of the compositions might have been the visual and codified transcription of orally

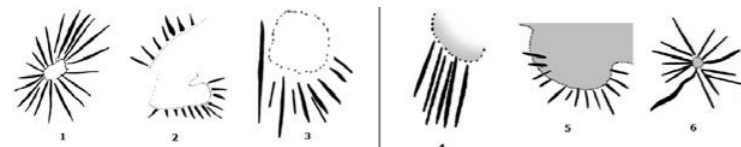


Figure 8. Radiant patterns of the Puisots (left) and Malmontagne (right) styles: 1 - les Puisots 24; 2 and 3 - Chailleuse 1; 4 - Malmontagne 50; 5 and 6 - Haut Mont 50. Tracings by the author and Laurent Valois.

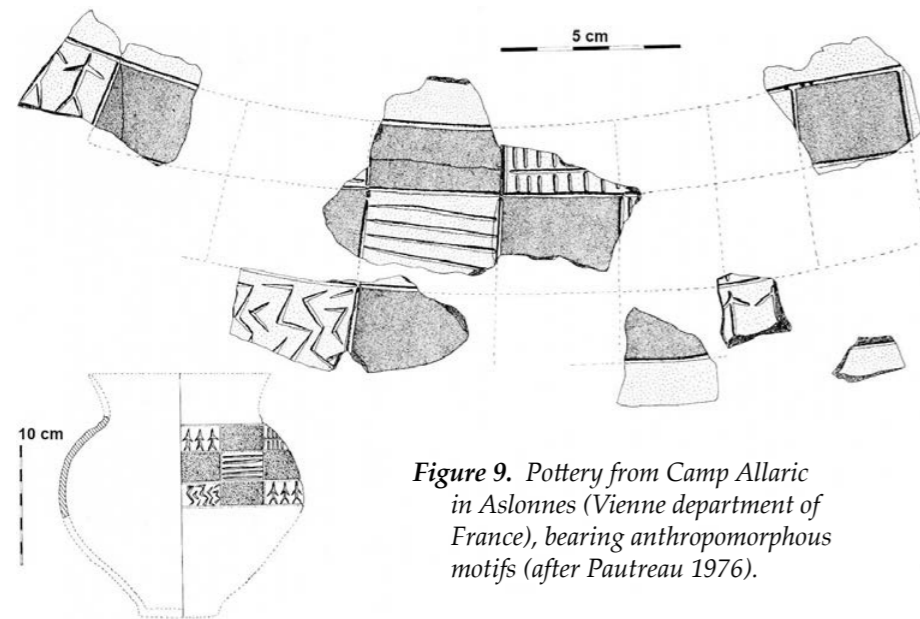


Figure 9. Pottery from Camp Allaric in Aslonnes (Vienne department of France), bearing anthropomorphic motifs (after Pautreau 1976).

transmitted stories or even visions or dreams experienced by initiates. Although they were separated by some 30 to 40 km, the engravers of Malmontagne and Puisots undoubtedly shared closely related spiritual conceptions of the world and highly similar or even common beliefs and cultural traits, which they translated and interpreted differently in their particular zones.

The most notable differences between the two sets can be seen mainly in the engraved patterns. Indeed, most of the recurring signs of the Malmontagne style are absent or almost absent from the Puisots style. For example, none of the panels that have been discovered so far at Puisots contains such typical Malmontagne motifs as opposing combs, swastikas, rectangles divided by diagonals, arboriforms, or beings with one or more triangular heads. Likewise, there are only nine representations of one of the most common Malmontagne motifs, a cross with a dot in each quadrant (each time on a movable block), two of a mono-punctuated triangle, and only twelve cruciform engravings as opposed to several dozen in the Malmontagne corpus.

The following table gives an overview of the number of patterns that the two styles share.

Despite indisputable differences, the representations of female beings (27, 28, 59 and 60 in Fig. 4) in the two stylistic groups show an undeniable kinship. This is true both of the figures' morphology, which often includes enlarged vulvas and striped rectangular torsos that might portray garments, and their positioning within compositions, since such beings are often placed

in or on a depression or a compartment of the sandstone, a prominence, or a panel's edge in both ensembles. Unlike in the Malmontagne corpus, where one or more birds often accompany this female being, only six cases showing her with an avian form has been found in the Puisots ensemble (Chailleuse 5) (51 in Fig. 4). The association of the two, in that case, is the same as in several of the Malmontagne compositions (20 in Fig. 4), where females with bars or grids on their bodies appear next to birds.

In both sets, the recurrent presence of 'deer', therianthropomorphs with antlers, 'woodlice' or 'myriapods', a spiky spiral pattern (found in a small number of cases) (9 and 46 in Fig. 4), 'vulvae' and wheel-like forms similar to Celtic *rouelle* amulets is also worth mentioning.

We should also underline that the fine workmanship and small size of another motif, furrows, which may appear alone or in series, link the two groups. The same is true for natural depressions

with radiating grooves, which occur in both sets (Fig. 8).

Despite the similarities of the two styles, there are also considerable differences. The table in Figure 5 shows the motifs from the Puisots ensemble that are utterly absent from the Malmontagne corpus.

Among the most numerous signs that are unique to Puisots are 'coifed' anthropomorphs (5 to 10 in Fig. 5) with 30 known examples, rectangular-headed creatures (15 to 22 in Fig. 5) with 29 examples, circular engravings (30 and 31 in Fig. 5) with 144 cases, and barbed furrows (46 to 56 in Fig. 5) with 121.

Certain barbed furrows (50, 52, 54 and 55 in Fig. 5) might be headless figures like those seen on ceramics found at Camp Allaric in the Vienne department of France (Fig. 9). Nevertheless, the connection is not as evident in other cases. The only other links between the Puisots style and ceramics from the terminal Bronze Age (Ha B3) are nine cruciforms with a dot in each of their four quadrants and several threadlike stick figures with heads formed by a cupule.

4. Conclusion

The typological links between the engraved elements of the Puisots and Malmontagne ensembles demonstrate that the styles share common cultural and spiritual traits. The engravings are often made in cramped cavities. Their workmanship is fine and neat. The panels are the same size and occur in the same positions. Their compositions often include similar as-

sociations of anthropomorphous figures and fantastic beings, geometric signs and recognisable animals. As in the Malmontagne engravings, the Puisots engravers may have represented themselves as anthropomorphous stick figures with a cupule head or headdress.

On the other hand, the dominance and sometimes disproportionate size of some fantastic beings or animals could suggest representations of deities or deified creatures. A few of the most complex compositions seem to be symbolic representations of mythological stories or scenes. Despite the 30 to 40 km distance between the two stylistic groups, the Malmontagne and Puisots engravers undoubtedly had overlapping spiritual cultures and shared some beliefs, which they interpreted in the particular ways of their own stylistic zone.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Duncan Caldwell for the translation; to Michel Rey and Valérie Testart for the photographs; and to the three anonymous RAR peer reviewers.

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